

NSC BRIEFING

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16 September 1959

LAOS

- I. A new stage in Laotian developments is opening with the arrival of the UN fact-finding mission.
 - A. Laos is confident the investigation will bear out charges of North Vietnamese involvement.
 1. While the case rests largely on strong circumstantial evidence, there is also captured Communist arms and equipment of recent manufacture. The Laotian government claims there are reliable eyewitnesses to Vietnamese participation in the recent attacks. *and also claims to have eight Vietnamese prisoners.*
 2. ~~Harsh terrain, inclement weather and will-of-the-wisp~~ tactics of the enemy, however, are the major obstacles to effective observation.]
- II. The Soviet Union, in an effort to throw a monkey wrench into the UN activity on Laos which it condemns as illegal, has called for a conference of nations which participated in the 1954 Geneva settlement of the Indochina war.
 - A. Moscow warned that annulment of the 1954 Geneva agreements "would destroy the only legal basis for the maintenance of peace in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia."
 - ~~B. This is the strongest stand yet taken by the USSR on Laos.~~
 - B~~c~~. Communist bloc propaganda is also continuing to play up alleged overtures by Laotian dissidents for negotiations with the Royal government on the basis of the Geneva and Vientiane agreements.

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III. The French have begun efforts both in Paris and on the local scene to deprecate the military threat to Laos.

- A. The French pooh-pooh Vietnamese Communist troop involvement and attribute the fighting to the political and military ineptness of the Phoui government.
- B. There is a danger that the French view may contaminate the UN subcommittee findings as the French still retain influence in the Laotian government, particularly in the intelligence service.
- C. The French apparently hold the view that some concessions to the Pathet Lao by the Laotian government would stabilize the situation.

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- V. Arrival of the "UN mission has given Laotian morale shot in the arm and may provide a breathing spell during which the Laotian military can regain its balance.
- A. ^{Some} ~~Strong~~ support is building up for indefinite retention of the UN presence in Laos to help deter Communist operations.
- B. Sporadic fighting still continues in northern Laos as a complete stand-down would tend to refute the Communist portrayal of a "popular uprising."

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